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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 000062

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SUBJECT: FRENCH AMBASSADOR ON CHAD-SUDAN, POWS, CHILD
SOLDIERS, AND EUFOR-MINURCAT

REF: NDJAMENA 0055

Classified By: AMBASSADOR LOUIS J. NIGRO, JR. FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: French Ambassador Foucher told Ambassador January 28 that France regretted that President Deby did not take stronger action or speak out more clearly against mistreatment of POWs and recruitment of child soldiers. He expressed the strong French view that Sudan was far more to blame for bilateral tensions than Chad, which sought a peaceful border with its stronger neighbor, and that Khartoum's support for Chadian rebels in Sudan was far more substantial and purposeful than Chad's grudging support for Sudanese JEM rebels in Chad. He said that France had strongly warned President Deby against cross-border attacks into Sudan and had warned President Bechir even more strongly that there were limits beyond which it should not try to go in its squabble with Chad. Foucher said France sought not only security for camps and humanitarian efforts from the EUFOR and MINURCAT deployment but also "concrete results," and cited assistance for the return of 20,000-30,000 Chadian displaced persons to their homes. Foucher welcomed any U.S. support for the deployment, especially in the area of reconstruction.

¶2. (C) Foucher was clear that France still retains great influence with Deby and is not reticent about using it; that France considers Sudan the clear offending party and Chad the offended party in the Chad-Sudan dispute; and that France has conveyed to Khartoum the limits Paris has set to Sudanese threats to Chadian security, including regime change in N,Djamena. END COMMENT.

¶3. (U) Ambassador and French Ambassador Bruno Foucher had a working lunch January 28 to discuss a variety of issues. We report Foucher,s views on salient ones.

CHILD SOLDIERS

¶4. (C) Foucher said that he had gone to President Deby repeatedly on the issue of recruitment of child soldiers and that Deby,s position was that it was the rebels, not the Chad military, who were recruiting the underaged. Foucher conceded that Deby was correct insofar as it was true that the practice was not a matter of government policy, but of lack of government authority over military subordinates. Deby did speak out on the issue at French insistence, but

took no effective action to correct the situation and punish offenders. Foucher added that it was the line commanders who were recruiting youthful soldiers partly because military service by the underaged carries "no taboo" in Chadian society. Even so, Foucher said, President Deby was missing an opportunity to legitimize his rule and avoid international censure by not speaking and acting more straightforwardly on child soldiers.

TREATMENT OF POWS

15. (C) Foucher said much the same was true of the mistreatment of POWS, which was occurring in Chad, not as a matter of government policy but as a result of lack of government control of its own military, especially outside N'Djamena. Foucher said he had protested vigorously in favor of full access by the International Red Cross (ICRC) to POWS, which the government conceded in principal but had difficulty enforcing on recalcitrant field commanders. In the end, according to Foucher, the ICRC got access.

EUFOR/MINURCAT

16. (C) Foucher said that it was France's goal not only that EUFOR and MINURCAT provide security to the camps and humanitarian workers in their areas of operations, but that there be concrete and measurable results of their efforts. He said that France expected that 20,000 to 30,000 internally displaced Chadians would return to their homes by the end of this year.

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17. (U) Foucher said that France and the EU welcomed U.S. support to EUFOR and MINURCAT, especially to assist in reconstruction efforts. Leaving behind tangible improvements were the real objectives of stability and reconstruction operations which the EU and the UN expected to mount in the wake of the peacekeeping operations.

CHAD-SUDAN

18. (C) Foucher said that France had repeatedly and sternly warned Chad about cross-border operations into Sudan and had similarly warned Sudan about its actions vis--vis Chad. But even so, Foucher allowed, the situations were fundamentally different. Chad's support for the JEM rebels was tepid and passive compared to Sudan's active and robust support for Chadian rebel groups. The JEM, he claimed, had ample sources of financial and assistance besides Deby's rather grudging support. The JEM's "Turabist" nature ensured it important support from many sympathizers, including in the Gulf states and Libya, while the Sudanese government was the sole source of assistance for Chad rebel groups on its soil. President Deby, according to Foucher, wanted to avoid confrontation with Sudan because he understood his military and political weakness vis--vis Khartoum. But Deby did a poor job of public diplomacy and of making his government's policy understood - partly a result of his own distaste for public speaking and pronouncements - which meant he missed opportunities to win international support and understanding, even in comparison with the Sudanese regime's actions.

19. (C) Foucher said that nothing had come of the January 27 Tripoli meeting but that more might be forthcoming from a follow-up meeting there February 5. Foucher said that the border was very unstable; that Sudan had been generous in recent assistance to Chad rebel groups; and that those groups were mounted in some 200 vehicles and were indeed restless and evidently intent on moving towards the Chad border. At the moment, he said, Sudan might well be biding its time, waiting until after the Addis Summit to push the rebels groups forward into Chad.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

¶10. (C) Foucher said that Deby was understandably focused on the security situation in eastern Chad and related multilateral diplomacy. This included a meeting with Presidents Bongo and Sassou Nguesso in Libreville last week, with the Presidents of Libya, Sudan, Egypt and Eritrea in Tripoli yesterday, and a follow-on to the latter meeting scheduled for next week. Even so, he said, Deby's refusal to take advantage of the August 13 agreement with opposition parties on electoral reform was another missed opportunity. Deby could count on at least some of the opposition parties to rally to his support if he approached them seriously and offered something in return. This would not only earn him additional internal support but win him favor with the international community, which was interested in the future of electoral reform and good governance in Chad.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Foucher was clear that France retains great influence with Deby and is not reticent about using it; that France considers Sudan the clear offending party and Chad the offended party in the Chad-Sudan dispute; and that France has conveyed to Khartoum the limits Paris has set to Sudanese threats to Chadian security, including regime change in N'Djamena.
NIGRO